

THE BEDOUIN OF THE DESERT 25

369 it on over his old one, and since none of his garments are
 291 ever removed, the older garment gradually falls to pieces
 and after a while disappears altogether. This story, like
 much of the fiction of the world, though not strictly ac-
 [515] curate is based on painful truth, for baths are not so fre-
 [291] quent in the Bedouin's life as they should be, and the
 laundering of clothes is still less adequate.

515 But it is easy to blame the Bedouin for being dirty.
 312 Dirty he certainly is and his clothes even more so, but
 what is to be expected when water is so scarce that for
 lack of it animals frequently go thirsty, and sometimes
 even men? We forget that cleanliness is a luxury, and
 a very expensive luxury at that. Through the summer
 287 the Bedouin women wash their hair in camel's urine be-
 302 cause water is so precious that it cannot be wasted for
 312 such a purpose. The men apparently go without wash-
 515 ing. Clothes require no comment, for their condition is
 what might be imagined. By far the commonest hunt-
 ing in Arabia is the hunt for wild game in the hair and
 clothes. It is always successful. The ablutions required
 783 before prayers are commonly performed with sand. The
 515 delight of such people upon arriving at some place where
 water is abundant and where bodies and clothes can be
 washed is a good thing to see.

262 The diet of these desert Arabs is ordinarily very
 frugal. A drink of camel's milk and a handful of dates
 are a day's rations for an adult, and more is not expected.

[272] There will also be an occasional drink of coffee, of which
 [414] the Bedouin is inordinately fond. Even the poorest Bed-
 ouin tent will have some sort of a battered and worn
 coffee pot for this purpose. Bread is a rare luxury in
 such homes, and meat even a rarer one. A feeble old
 camel on the verge of dissolution will render a last service

True Bedu coffee is strong, devoid of milk or sugar but flavoured with herbs; and its consumption is the occasion of much social activity—the rounding off of the day, and an opportunity for discussion, and the reception of guests. For the Badawin, if not for city dwellers, coffee is truly the 'wine of Islam', and the equipment of all Badawin households includes at least one carpet, which is spread before the hearth, a mortar, and coffee pots and cups. A few cooking pots, and one or two large trays and bowls for communal eating make up the remainder of the culinary equipment.

Clothing of the Badawin is simple. A long robe of thick material is the principal, sometimes in fact the only, garment. In winter a waterproof cloak of woven camel hair is worn. A voluminous headcloth, held in place by a rope or band, is wound round the head so as to give protection to the face and neck, and rawhide, heelless sandals are worn on the feet.

Water is usually too precious for much washing¹—indeed, the Koran permits the ceremonial use of sand in the daily ablutions which are enjoined on all Moslems—and animal urine is frequently used as a substitute. Badawin food is monotonous and scanty. Most important are milk products: curds, buttermilk, various kinds of cheese—of which *labné*, a kind of cream cheese, is the most widespread—and *samné*, or butter. In addition, wheat, barley, and occasionally a little rice are obtained by barter, blackmail, or brigandage from agriculturalists, or else grown very sporadically by the nomads themselves.² Small amounts of dried fruit, usually dates, are also eaten. Meat is provided only as a great luxury, since animals themselves are in effect a kind of fixed capital—owners must live from the yield, not upon the animal itself. Apart, then, from occasions of high festival, when special slaughtering takes place, only those animals that die naturally are eaten.

Meals are served first to the older men of the tent, each man using his dagger as a knife, and fingers as a fork,³ after which, when they are satisfied, it is the turn of the younger men and boys. Later still come the women, and finally the girls—the sexes never intermingling during meals. On occasion when supplies are plentiful, the Badawin

¹ It has been said of a present-day certain Wahhabi tribe of Arabia that all adult members have at least once in their lifetime been forced to eat on water taken from the hump of a camel.

² Patches of ground are roughly sown with grain, and later in the year tribesmen return to harvest the crop.

³ As far as possible, use of the left hand is avoided in polite Arab society—this hand is employed for menial and unpleasant tasks.

Faults and Virtues

Chap. III

515 Dirty he and his wife always are, but theirs is the dirt of the field, a thing totally different from the dirt of the town. He never washes his clothes till they are about to drop off, and then he replaces them. He and his good wife are covered with body lice, and reek of camel manure and other choice odours, but the important parts of the body are kept clean, and the wife bathes her hair once a week in she-camel's urine, and thus rids her head of vermin for a few days.

57 Both the Badawin and his women are envious to a degree, and cupidity is the breath of life to them. Both are as full of *hasad* and *tama'* (envy and cupidity) as anyone in this world could be, and they never tire of saying that others around them suffer from these vices but never they themselves. *Hasad* takes the form of backbiting at every opportunity, and disparaging the efforts and good name of anyone who happens to be better off. His *tama'* is proverbial and has caused him to be dubbed by certain Westerners "the arch parasite of world society". True it is that you can make a Badawin man or woman do pretty well anything in this world except (and here I speak for the desert only) sacrifice his or her honour, by the offer of money.

Yet with all these faults I have found the Badawin and his wife to be the most lovable and delightful of all people, just primitive Adams and Eves, like their ancestors.

77 The true Badawin is a deeply religious man, and his hard life in the desert with its perpetual dangers to man and beast increases his sense of nearness to and dependence on his Maker. The grim scenery which surrounds him, the wide sandy deserts, the blood-colour of blazing sunsets, the deep yellow-black of the dust storms, a very incarnation of monstrous evil, and last but not least the devilish flicker of the witch's oven, as it trembles above the ground, with its cruel sister the ever-deceiving mirage, all tend to convince him that the One and Indivisible God is near him always and if only he be a true Musulmán will help him when peril is about. The thought of God is always with him, and the name of Allah is perpetually on his lips. He prays ceremonially five times a day. He can and will do nothing without invoking God's aid. After his duty towards God, comes duty towards his neighbour, and to a lesser extent towards himself. His whole code can be summed up in the following few sentences:

Siting the Tent

Chap. IV

- 231 plural: *salag*), on the other hand, are regarded as clean, especially by
325 those Badawin following the Maliki tenets of Islam (who are in the majority in Hasa and Kuwait), and they are allowed to enter tents and sleep in the women's portion at will. They are valued for hunting purposes, and are taught to kill hare and gazelle for the pot. Great care is taken that there shall be no interbreeding between the tent watch-dogs and the *salagi*, and when the female *salagi* of the household is on heat one of her hind legs is attached by a leather thong to her collar, thus forcing her to sit down, which effectually prevents a heavy dog covering her.

A STRANGER ARRIVING AT A TENT

- 5K A stranger arriving must approach a Badawin tent from the front only. It is the worst of bad form to come up from the back. He must then approach the guest side of the tent and halt and make his camel kneel while some way off. This shows that he wants a night's rest or some food. He must never approach or halt his camel near the women's end of the tent (*muharram*). The purpose of this custom is to give the women time to adjust their *burgas* or veils whilst the visitor is some distance off. Were the visitor to come up from behind, he might come upon an unveiled woman attending to nature or washing her hair, or cleaning kitchen utensils.

FAVOURITE SPOTS FOR PITCHING TENTS

- 342 In choosing a tent site the proximity of water is, of course, the first essential. Next, the nature of the grazing decides where a man will wish to pitch his tent. If he is migrating with the tribe or part of the tribe, the tent owner leaves the selection of the area to be camped on to the shaikh, but tries for the convenience of himself and his family to get as close as possible to a sandy mullah or dry water course with high banks. This is very important, for it allows the whole household,
342 and especially the women, to attend to their toilet and other sanitary
575 duties out of sight and in sandy surroundings which are ideally health-
514 ful. In this connection a Badawin (male or female) never unnecessarily soils the ground, but makes a point of digging a small hole in the sand, which he afterwards fills in. If water is scarce, as more often than not

Changing Camp

Chap. IV

- 342 it is, sand may be used for the necessary ablutions in place of water.
● 515 So the cleaner and more handy the sandy bed of the nullah, the happier
514 are the occupants of the tent.

The phrase "proximity of water" is used in a relative sense only. In summer it must, of course, be close, within at most half a mile, but preferably much closer. In winter, however, when camels are not watered at all, and sheep and mares drink only once in four days, camps may be pitched twenty or thirty miles from any well. The household water is brought out on camel-back and in large and small skins, whilst sheep are sent off to drink at the wells, or in exceptional circumstances have water brought to them on camels.

CHANGING THE CAMPING GROUND

- 515 For sanitary reasons the camping ground is changed every eight or
233 ten days, but especially to provide new grazing for the camels and sheep. An ordinary change of ground usually involves a march of ten or twelve miles, always provided water is handy. This is not in any sense a "migration", which will be described in a later chapter.
- 492 When it is time to move, tents are struck, and tents and other heavy material are loaded on to the male camels (*jama*), which are stronger and more suited for the work than the females: lighter gear, spare water, etc., are placed on selected females, and of course the family
(591) themselves mount on riding camels, the women moving off sheltered in their *maksars* or *givas*, the tops of which are canopied over with bright coloured woollen or cotton material, as a protection both from the eyes of men and from the sun. The men go before on their *dhalils*. If an individual householder with half a dozen tents is changing ground, he himself heads the procession, while his sheep and milch camels either follow, grazing as they go on a flank or in the rear, or have already been sent on ahead. When nearing the new ground, the head of the house rides ahead, selects the site for the tents, makes his camel kneel *sawwaf* of *dhalil* and declares this to be the new camping ground.
- 701 If a whole tribe is changing ground the fighting men move out first
221 under their leader, all of them riding *dhalils* and with mares and horses attached to their saddles by long leading ropes. Scouts (*shar*) have

Hair-Dressing

Chap. IX

- **Hijil*—(plural: *hijjal*) massive anklet of gold or silver (worn above ankle). ^B
- **Hama*—Gold cap for head, from which hangs a chain down either side ³⁰¹
of face known as *tallal*. Used by brides. ^K
- **Kubds*—Gold drop-like ornaments hanging on strings which are woven ³⁰¹
into the plaits of hair, at back of head. (These are worn by wealthy
people only.)
- **Mathayid*—Plain straight gold bangles. If they are wavy they are known
as *mathayid al haiya*.
- **Hazzam*—Gold waistband worn over *dera'ah* or frock.
- **Khuwaisat*—Thick handsome bracelets of gold, studded with turquoise.
- **Gub-gub*—Gold cap worn by brides and little girls in Kuwait on festive
days. It is made of small jointed squares of solid gold, each square
being studded with a single turquoise. The cap is kept in place by
the hair, which is threaded through loops at the back, and then
braided.
- Dalag*—Badawin bracelet of coloured beads.

WOMEN'S HAIR

The Mutair, 'Ajman, Dhafir, Rashaida and 'Awazim women, and ^B
women of Central and Eastern Arabia generally, do their hair in nine ³⁰²
plaits. These are divided as follows, two on either side of the face ^K
which show down the side of the head, and thinner ones at the back, ³⁰²
starting from the middle of the forehead, and one below them
at the neck. The hair is washed every seven days, and usually redressed
once a week when *dahan* (local hair oil) is put on it: sometimes a
mixture of herbs—*rashidish* or henna is also put on after. Camel's
urine is a favourite Badawin hair wash, as it bleaches the hair and
kills insects. The Shammar and some Mutair women use the dried
leaves of *nift* (sometimes called *kongress*) (*Trigonella stellata*) in place
of *rashidish*. A comb (made of wood) only is used, and is called a
mishk. The townswomen use the dried and pounded leaves of the sidr
tree as a hair wash after applications of henna paste.

When Badawin women dance they undo all their plaits and allow
the hair to fall entirely loose.

Sin or *simach* (a poison used for killing fish) is also used to kill ^B
lice on the head. (Arenic?) ⁵¹⁵

To clean their teeth, women use a piece of the bark of a tree ^K
called *darum*. This cleans remarkably well, and adds to the beauty ⁵¹⁶

Use of Henna

Chap. IX

• ^B515 effect by turning the lips saffron-red. This is more commonly used
^Kby townswomen than by their Badawin sisters.
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DRESS FOR THE HAJ

^K788 Just as the man wears the 'iḥḍām, a white loin cloth and white
792 shoulder wrap when performing the pilgrimage, all Arab women must
^Bwear a special costume* when they enter the precincts of Mecca on
788 pilgrimage. This consists of
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- (a) Green *sirwal* (pantaloon).
- (b) Green *shamb* (muslin over-dress).
- (c) Green *shiddāḥ* (frock).
- (d) Black 'abba.
- (e) *Milfa* (veil).

^K765 When a woman, especially a townswoman, is in mourning she also
wears green clothes.

HENNA AND ITS USES

^B302 The use of black henna (*ammar*) for the soles of the feet and hands,
^Kand red henna (*hina*) for the tips of the fingers and toes is universal
302 among *hadhar* townswomen. The Badawin girls use only red henna
and then only to decorate their hands, finger nails and toe nails. They
do not decorate the rest of their feet. Usually the henna is applied
three times, so as to get the right shade. The henna is powdered and
mixed with water till a fairly liquid paste is made. It is then applied
very thickly and carefully, with a wooden stick, on the hands or feet
in accordance with the pattern desired. It is then allowed to dry
quickly in front of a fire until the paste cracks and falls or is picked
off. This is done three times, or four if a very dark colour is required.

Some women prefer that the henna markings should be black,
especially for the feet. To arrange this, another paste is made from
powdered lime (*saḥrā*) and powdered crystal ammonia (*akawada*) and
is applied over the orange henna markings. At once the orange mark-

^K841 * If a woman has her period when she enters the sacred precinct of Mecca to per-
^Bform the Haj, then her pilgrimage is null and void, as she is considered unclean.
841 Several Arab ladies of Kuwait have enquired from the lady doctor when about to go
on the Haj, if she could give them medicine to delay periods when due.

Sex Indulgence

Chap. IX

- 834 removes the *hijab* or mask from his bride's face on the first night.
291 She invariably tries to keep it on for about ten days or so out of modesty. His Majesty Bin Sa'ud, however, told the writer that he had had, he supposed, some four hundred wives during his life, but had never seen the face of any one of them. He presumably referred to his many Badawin brides, whom he married usually for a night or two, and then divorced them. This is a custom common among important shaikhs, and involves no disgrace at all to the girl or to the man. Should a child result from these one-or-two-night marriages, the shaikh or big man gives the mother a salary till the child is four or five years old, and then the child is taken away from the mother and placed in the father's house. During this nursing period the mother must not marry. If she does, the child is at once taken away and given to a wet nurse. The Al Sa'ud, Al Subah, Al Khalifah princes regularly go in for such alliances among their Badawin subjects, but usually take away at an early age any children that may be born.
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515 Both man and woman must have a complete bath after sexual intercourse. This is a precept of religion, and the wildest Badawin must conform to this rule. Even though only a small bowl of water may be available, the whole body must be washed all over.*
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515 During her monthly periods a woman is forbidden to have intercourse with her husband for full seven days. When the menstrual period is over, a woman is unclean until she washes all over; this is called "washing her hair" (*ghasal al ras*).†
- 733 During Ramadhan (the annual thirty-day fast) sexual intercourse is forbidden by day, but not by night.

It is no exaggeration to say that sexual intercourse is loved by the ordinary Arab above all pleasures in the world. It is the one *gimm* pleasure common to rich and poor alike, and the one moment of forgetfulness in his daily round of troubles and hardships that Badawin or townsman can enjoy. Men and women equally love the act, which is said to keep man young, "just like riding a mare".

The Arab seems to possess strength above the average for sexual

* Prayer of a woman after sexual intercourse when performing ablutions:
*A salli ala Muhammad wa ala Muhammad nassid uphal on il jannat fi hadha al wa al
fari hadha 'Hak al'ah.*

† When a girl reaches womanhood, she is said to be "Now washing her head".

/a/woman. Their mode of life is very much like
543 that of other Anaisa Beduins (not like Sulubba),
but owing to the taint in their blood, no Beduin
tribe will intermarry with them.

OTHER BASE-BORN TRIBES

While the Sulubba are the lowest of the
ignoble tribes, they are not alone. Arabia is
full of base-born tribesmen, with whom the
"thoroughbred" Beduin will not intermarry.

Hasim

These people seem to be a tribe of almost
544 as low standing as the Sulubba. They do not,
however, work as tinkers or hunters, but live
a pastoral life, like the Beduins. The Hasim?
live around Jauf or with the Ruwaila.

Sherarat

They live principally around Jauf, where
they are collected into a considerable tribe,
but members of the Sherarat are found scattered
among the Ruwaila, Beni, Sakhr, Huwaitat, and
545 Shammar. Among these tribes the Sherarat per-
form the menial tasks of servants and herdsmen.

The origin of the Sherarat is unknown. They
are not as debased as the Sulubba, but they are
546 far inferior to the Beduins. Their tents are
usually very small and ragged, and their clothing
even dirtier and much scantier than that of the
ordinary Beduins.